SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN IN THE SLAVIC LITERATURE

The organized and systematic integration of the Slavs into the Helleno-roman culture began in the mid 9th century with the work of the Thessalonians brothers Saints Constantine-Cyril and Methodius, and with that of their students in Magna Moravia and Pannonia¹. The objective of this effort was, firstly, to make the Helleno-roman culture known to the newcomer Slavs, as it had been shaped in the 9th century after its encounter with Christianity, and secondly to integrate them gradually into it².

¹ For SS Constantin–Cyril and Methodius and their works in the Slavic world see Fr. Dvornik, Byzantine missions among the Slavs; SS. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius, Rutgers University Press 1970, I. Tarnanidis, Σελίδες από την εκκλησιαστική γραμματεία των Σλάβων, Thessaloniki 2004 and Α. Ε. Ταχιασ, Κύριλλος και Μεθόδιος. Οι θεμελιώτες της αρχαίας σλαβικής γραμματείας, Thessaloniki 1992 with more bibliography.

We should here point out that during the 9th century the Helleno-roman culture was still under the united Church, which was struggling to preserve it through very difficult circumstances. These circumstances had been shaped by the barbaric invasions into Western and Eastern Europe, which had broken the close ties between the Roman West and East. This had led to the fall of the Western Roman Empire and had put the Eastern Roman Empire under extreme pressure.

Therefore, when the two Thessalonian brothers were ordered to teach the holy Gospel to the Slavs of Magna Moravia in their own language, they practically had to integrate them into the culture of the Helleno-roman world. We should stress that what was decisive in their work, was the cultural tradition of the Greek-speaking Eastern Roman Empire which was continuing the tradition of the Helleno-roman world. Naturally, they did not underestimate nor did they reject the Latin tradition of the Helleno-roman world, represented by the Roman Church, which they had repeatedly proven to respect.

A characteristic example of the way the two Thessalonian brothers approached the Western ecclesiastical tradition is the case of the Liturgy (Missa) of Saint Peter, which is mentioned in

\[\text{μετασχηματισμού τον βυζαντινού πολιτισμού από τους σλαβικούς λαούς (από τον 6' έως τον 12' αιώνα),} \]
\[\text{translat. Α. Delikari, Αθήνα 2008.} \]

the Vita of St. Methodious⁴, extant in some Old Slavonic manuscripts such as the manuscript of the New Collection of the Monastery of Mount Sinai found in 1975 (Ms 5/N probably of the 11th century)⁵. Although the manuscripts containing the Missa of Saint Peter surviving to this day, including the manuscript 5/N of Mount Sinai, are later than the mission of Cyril and Methodius in Great Moravia, they echo the tradition the two brothers had founded and which their students had followed since. This combined Liturgy is an eloquent example of the respect for the eastern and western ecclesiastical tradition in the context of the still united Church⁶.

If this assessment is correct, then it is confirmed that Constantine–Cyril and Methodius promoted in the Slavic world the respect for the ecclesiastical tradition of both the East and the West indiscriminately. This is why their Slav students learned to accept and honour both traditions as the fruit of the life of the united Church. Of course, they acknowledged and honoured the memory and the teaching of both the eastern and western Fathers, who had founded the Tradition of the united Church. Saint Ambrose of Milan, one of the most prominent Fathers of the Church, could not remain unknown to the Slavic people. So arguably they learned about him soon after their Christianization.

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⁵ A Liturgy combining both Eastern and Western liturgical traditions is saved in this manuscript. The Roman Canon (Canon Actionis) «Te igitur clementissime Pater...» is inserted in the text of the Eastern liturgical tradition. See I. Tarnanidis, The Slavonic Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, Thessaloniki 1988, 103-108.

We should here point out that the Slavs could not access his work easily, because of the decisive role played by the provenance and language of the missionaries who were active in the Slavic world. Furthermore, since a part of the Slavs was connected to Rome and another part to Constantinople after the Schism, their Tradition was shaped accordingly. So, the western Slavs, who followed the Church of Rome after the Schism and stayed connected with the Latin Tradition, could easily access the work of Ambrose. On the other hand, the Southern and Eastern Slavs who followed Constantinople and the Greek Tradition had difficulty in accessing his work. But we should say that they never forgot Saint Ambrose and his work.

The research through catalogues of manuscripts kept in various libraries (mainly in Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, Bulgaria and Russia) shows the continuous veneration of and hagiological reverence for Saint Ambrose in manuscripts of Menaia and Synaxaria especially from the 13th century onwards. These

manuscripts are written in Bulgarian, Serbian, and Russian, a fact which proves that Saint Ambrose was also honoured by the orthodox Slavic world. His feast is on December 7th in all the Menaia and Synaxaria.

Although the number of these manuscripts is rather limited, their geographical dissemination from Russia and Bulgaria to Mount Athos and Mount Sinai and their dating from the 13th century up to the 18th, is evidence to their being a characteristic and trustworthy sample for our research.

The oldest record we could trace comes from manuscript No 14/N of the New Collection of Mount Sinai. It is written in Serbian and is dated in the 13th century. It contains the Heortologion of the whole year and Saint Ambrose’s feast day is on 7th December.

We may find Saint Ambrose’s cult and hagiological reverence in four manuscripts from the 14th century.

17.11.4 of the collection of the Academy of Sciences of Russia, which contains Synaxaria for the half of the year in Russian.

WSI33 (II 87 ÖNB – Cod. Slav. 33) of the collection of the National Library of Austria, which contains the Menaion of December in Serbian.

Хлуд 195 of the collection of Khludov of the National Museum of History in Moscow, which contains the Menaia of the months December and January and a collection of speeches and Vitae for the months between February and June in Serbian.

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9 I would like to thank Professor I. Tarnanidis for offering me the microfilm of the manuscript No 14N (New Collection of Monastery of Sinai). See also I. Tarnanidis, The Slavonic Manuscripts, 134-141.
10 Pergamennye rukopisi biblioteki Akademii nauk SSSR, 125.
11 Ivanova, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balkano-Slavica, 168, 350.
12 Ivanova, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balkano-Slavica, 156, 350.
Зогр. 94 of the collection of the Monastery of Zografou (Mount Athos), which contains the Menaia of the months November and December in Bulgarian\textsuperscript{13}.

We may find three manuscripts from the 15\textsuperscript{th} century.

Драг 706 of the collection of the Monastery of Dragomirna, which contains Menaia of the months November and December in Moldovlachian\textsuperscript{14}.

Р/М 4/5 of the collection of the Monastery of Rila, which contains panegyrics for the months between September and January in Serbian\textsuperscript{15}.

Путна 65 of the collection of the Monastery of Poutna, which contains panegyrics for December in Moldovlachian\textsuperscript{16}.

We may find one manuscript from between the 15\textsuperscript{th} (second half) and the 16\textsuperscript{th} century.

II 93 ÖNB – Cod. Slav. 53 of the collection of the National Library of Austria, which contains Vitae of saints for the months between September and January in Serbian\textsuperscript{17}.

We may find three manuscripts from the 17\textsuperscript{th} century.

Рс 59 of the collection of the National Library of Serbia, which contains the Menaia for the months between September and December in Serbian\textsuperscript{18}.

Хил. 442 of the collection of the Monastery of Chilandariou (Mount Athos), which contains the Menaion of December in Serbian\textsuperscript{19}.

Сигн. Пог. 517 of the collection of Pogodin, which contains the Menaion and Synaxaria of December in Bulgarian\textsuperscript{20}.

We may find two manuscripts from the 18\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{13} Ivanova, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balcano-Slavica, 72, 350.
\textsuperscript{14} Ivanova, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balcano-Slavica, 68-69, 350.
\textsuperscript{15} Ivanova, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balcano-Slavica, 129-130, 350.
\textsuperscript{16} Ivanova, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balcano-Slavica, 112, 350.
\textsuperscript{17} Birkfellner, Glagolitische und kyrillische Handschriften in Österreich, 250-257.
\textsuperscript{18} Ivanova, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balcano-Slavica, 132-134, 350.
\textsuperscript{19} Bogdanović, Katalog ćirilskih rukopisa Manastira Hilandara, 169-170, Ivanova, Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balcano-Slavica, 143, 350.
\textsuperscript{20} Ivanova, Rakoči v sbirkata na M. P. Pogodin, 141-147.
НБКМ 328 (62) of the collection of the National Library of Bulgaria, which contains speeches and Vitae in Bulgarian (it also contains the Vita of Saint Ambrose)\textsuperscript{21}.

II 135 ÖNB – Cod. Slav. 21 of the collection of the National Library of Austria, which contains the Menaion of December in Serbian\textsuperscript{22}.

Unfortunately, it was not possible for us to examine some of the above manuscripts and study their content in order to compare them with the Greek manuscripts and determine the relation between them or any similarities and differences. The comparison of the Menaion of December, which is used by the Orthodox Slavs to this day, with the Greek one shows the dependence of the former from the latter original, which it follows precisely. The Slavic Menaion, though, is briefer and contains fewer canons. Both the Slavonic and Greek Menaia contain the Services of the Vespers and Matins offered to Saint Ambrose\textsuperscript{23}.

We have to point out here that the dependence of a Slavic Service from the Greek one, as in the case of Saint Ambrose, is very frequent in the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Slavic Churches.

With regard to the writings of Saint Ambrose, we have to stress that his memory continued to exist in the orthodox Slavic world, although less widely than the works of the Greek Fathers, with which the Slavs were more familiar and could access much easily.

We may find only one miscellany in the catalogues of the Slavic manuscripts, which contains orations and Vitae of saints in Bulgarian (ЦИАМ 179). It is from Bulgaria, dated in 1782, and is kept in the Church Historical and Archaeological Museum (Cărkoven Istoriko-Arheologičesko Muzej) of Sofia. In this

\textsuperscript{21} Български рукописи запазени в България, No 629, 229.
\textsuperscript{22} Birkfellner, Glagolitische und kyrillische Handschriften in Österreich, 315-317.
\textsuperscript{23} See the Stable URL http://lib.pravmir.ru/library/readbook/1855#part_22219 (last entry 18/07/2014), where the Services of the Vespers and Matins of St. Ambrosius in the Slavic Menaion, and http://analogion.gr/glt/texts/Dec/07.uni.htm (last entry 18/07/2014), where the Services of the Vespers and Matins of St. Ambrosius in the Greek Menaion.
manuscript, there are orations for various feasts of the year, some of which are ascribed to Saint Ambrose\(^{24}\). This mention of Saint Ambrose in such a later-dated manuscript provides a strong argument in favour of his writings certainly being included in the medieval literature of the orthodox Slavic world.

With reference to the printed writings of Saint Ambrose in more recent times we may trace the first attempts, as may be expected, in Russia after the 18\(^{th}\) century. This was the time when the Russian theological thought came into closer contact with the Latin-speaking theology of the West\(^{25}\).

We were able to trace two publications of Saint Ambrose’s writings dating back to this period. The first one was printed by the Lavra of Kiev in 1824 and it contains the works *De excessu fratri Satyri*, *De obitu Theodosii* and *De obitu Valentiniani*\(^{26}\). The second book of Saint Ambrose containing hortative homilies was published in 1828 by the Synodal Print House of Moscow.

Nowadays the orthodox Slavic world and particularly the Russian world are interested anew in the writings of Saint Ambrose. A characteristic example of this interest is the publication of all his writings in modern Russian, a result of the collaboration of Russian and Italian scholars of the Orthodox Humanitarian University of Saint Tychon and the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana. Four volumes have been published up to the present and many more are expected to be published soon. Therefore, the

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24 Bălgarski răkopisi zapazeni v Bălgaria, No 667, 245. Unfortunately I couldn’t find out which these speeches are.


26 V. M. Undel'skago, *Hronologičeskiy ukazatel’ slavjano-russkikh knig cerkovnoj pečati sâ 1491 po 1864 g. Vyp. I. Očerkà slavjano-russkoj bibliografii*, Moskva 1871, No 255, 347. It is remarkable that two copies of this book have been found in the Collection of Russian books of the Monastery of Iveron in Mount Athos, which is being studied at the moment and its catalogue is being prepared.
entire work of Saint Ambrose will be published in a Slavic language for the first time\textsuperscript{27}.

Photos

The publication of the Lavra of Kiev in 1824 (Collection of Monastery of Iveron-Mount Athos)

The publication of the Synodal Print House of Moscow in 1828